For the first time in weeks it seems that if we save enough water our actions might result in us avoiding Day Zero. Water is now everybody’s business, and consequently there is hope that our businesses and workplaces will continue to function – keeping us financially and economically secure. This week’s Water File focuses on the plans businesses should have in place to reduce water demand, diversify the sources of water they are using, and also prepare for a Day Zero in their direct operations, with staff, neighbouring businesses and suppliers.

1. How will the ongoing drought and the prospect of Day Zero impact on my workplace?
Your work life is likely to be affected in a variety of ways. If water is an essential part of the business you are in, you will probably be doing things differently in order to adhere to water restrictions. If you are in an office job, by now you should have altered the bathroom etiquette around non-flushing and the use of hand sanitizers. But a Day Zero scenario would affect many workplaces more gravely. There might be radical changes in operations, such as shorter shifts, flexitime or work-from-home arrangements. There might also be complete shut-downs and possible retrenchments. It will depend on your industry and the level of continuity planning your workplace has been able to achieve.

2. What plans should be put in place and what questions should I be asking my employer?
Your business or workplace should have cut levels of water use by 45%. Ask management to show you evidence of how much water your company was using in 2015, and how much you are using now. Ask if your workplace has a business continuity plan and incident response plan around the drought and Day Zero. If so, request that it be circulated or communicated once it is ready, so you can see what your work has done in terms of risk assessment, drought preparation and to see what plans there are in the event of Day Zero. It will give you an idea what will happen to you as a staff member should Day Zero materialise. Request further clarification if needs be so that you know what to expect. See if there is clarity around reduced working hours, shifts, flexitime or work-from-home. Who has to be at work no matter what (essential services)? Are individual staff circumstances, such as parents with young children whose crèche might close, factored into such a scenario? How will the time needed to queue at distribution points for water be managed?

3. I have been told by my boss that there is a risk of shut-down and me losing my job. What can I do?
Retrenchments are a very realistic and worst-case possibility for employees in industries that are completely dependent on water, for example laundries, textile manufacturers, printers, food-and-beverage manufacturers, gardening services, pharmacies, gyms, plant nurseries, agriculture, hairdressers, bottle-washing factories or pool companies. Domestic workers and gardeners might face a similar risk, if house-owners plan to leave Cape Town during a Day Zero scenario. Some areas of Cape Town have water pressure drops already, making normal operation of business difficult. In case you are faced with a risk of retrenchment, or are worried about it, then it is important for you to have clarity on what decisions have been made by your workplace around the drought and Day Zero. The usual, formal procedures around retrenchment should apply during this water crisis. Staff should be consulted, given sound reasons, given the option of representation, exploring alternative options and fulfilling the correct administrative obligations.
DAY ZERO PREP - THIS WEEK’S BUCKET LIST:

- As an employee, initiate a water-related conversation at your workplace, asking your management about a business CONTINUITY PLAN and how much water have you already saved in your direct operations and your supply chain.

- As a trade union member, ask your labour representative if there is a stance around water and DROUGHT CRISES.

- As a manager, the new financial year is coming up. Ensure that “water saving & adaptation” becomes a prominent BUDGET LINE for the new financial year.

- As a manager or business owner, share your plan and water consumption with staff. INFORMATION SHARING builds the relationships that will see us through this together. Share the WWF Wednesday Water Files.

Useful links:
- 110% Green
- Drought Business Support
- Cape Town CCID
- WWF Wednesday Water Files

WWF is grateful for the participation of Claire Pengelly (GreenCape) in the compilation of this Water File.